

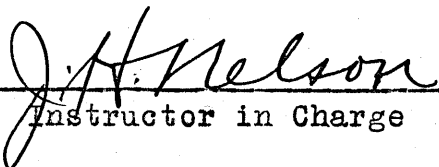
HUGH WALPOLE: A CATHEDRAL NOVELIST

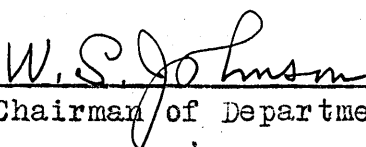
by

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## PREFATORY NOTE

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Hugh Walpole for having written The Cathedral, which gave me my first introduction both to the works of this author and to the beauty of English cathedrals.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Professor J.H. Nelson for his sympathetic interest and guidance throughout this study, and to the members of the staff of the Library of the University of Kansas for the consideration and assistance which they have given me during the past year.

Gertrude Sandusky

St. Joseph, Missouri  
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## INTRODUCTION

### WALPOLE AND THE ENGLISH CATHEDRAL

"It has happened," writes Hugh Walpole, that I have spent all my youth under the shadow of English cathedrals."<sup>1</sup> And he might have added, "They have influenced my life, they have influenced my thoughts, they have influenced my work," for to anyone who is at all familiar with Walpole's novels it is very evident that the English cathedral has done much to mould his character and writing.

Born of a family of clergy, Walpole spent the first eighteen years of his life almost entirely in cathedral towns. Indeed, his first conscious memory of the world was being held up by his nurse to look at the flowers in the yard of the Bishop of Auckland, New Zealand, where his father was at that time pastor of a small church. When he was six years old, he was sent back to his relatives in England, and it is from that time that we may date his actual experience of cathedral towns and society.

In his autobiography, The Crystal Box, Mr. Walpole has given us some intimate glimpses of his childhood among cathedrals. Since his own description of this environment is most significant if we are to understand the

1. The Crystal Box, Bookman 56, page 292.



part the cathedral plays in his work, it is perhaps permissible to quote at some length from this description.

My first cathedral was the Cathedral of Truro in the County of Cornwall, and this is the one that I shall always love most in my heart although it is neither the oldest nor the most beautiful - it is in fact nearly the youngest of all the English cathedrals, my father being its first precentor. It was when he was precentor there under Benson, its first bishop, that he met my mother, who was a Cornish lady, Barham by name, Foster and Carlyon by family, so that on my mother's side I am related to almost every family in the South Country.

I was only six years old when I was brought from New Zealand where I was born to Truro. That is thirty-two years ago, and it may be only romantic memory that forces me to fancy that my aunts, so quiet and so dignified, my cousin so pretty, my uncle the Archdeacon a little like Mr. Pickwick, and all the others lived in a world far more sweetly colored and sweetly toned than the world of today.....

I lived with an aunt in Truro for several years and had nothing but love and kindness and charity. I go back now to Truro whenever I have an opportunity. It is with the country that surrounds it the spot I love most in the world, save only London. It is one of those English towns into which the country lanes are forever breaking, where the river is lazy and fringed all the way to the sea with deep purple shadowed woods. The lanes are thicker with primroses than any other lanes in the world; the biscuits are sweeter, the bells softer, the knockers on the doors brighter, the canon's smiles broader, the animals' noises on market day more vociferous, the rooks in the elms more tempestuous, the sun hotter, the old maids kinder, the puppies and kittens and babies really young for a longer time, the gardens more shady, the circulating libraries more behind the times, the midday siesta more thorough than in any other town in England.

I at least will always believe so whatever anyone

2. The Crystal Box, II: Cathedral Piece, Bookman 56, pp. 292 ff.

else may say.

My second cathedral was Canterbury. I went to school in Canterbury and I lived there for several years with my godfather who was a canon of the cathedral. I was very happy there both at school and with my god-father. I remember very little of my years there.....

It was in Canterbury, too, that I first felt afraid of what a cathedral could be. I went one winter half holiday to an afternoon service. It was snowing heavily outside and I sat in the back of the nave and felt warm and cosy. I suppose that I fell asleep; in any case I woke suddenly to find the cathedral lit by a kind of ghostly whiteness, some shadow perhaps from the falling snow or caused by my imagination. Not a soul seemed to be about, the pillars of the nave hung, gigantic, above me and there seemed to be whispers on every side.

I walked a few paces down the horrible echoing nave and then I ran. In my confusion I could not find the opening to the great west door and stood there fumbling in the half darkness, my heart clapping like a muffled bell. It seemed to me then that the church was full of creatures. What kind of creatures, I did not dare to turn my head and see. I could hear their voices, could see them pressing one against the other down the nave - the creatures of the cathedral, so much more real than the people who sat in rows down the nave on a Sunday morning. When at last I found the handle, turned it, and was out safely in the precincts, I was three-quarters dead with terror.

It was from that moment I think that I began to be sure that cathedrals had lives of their own and very often wicked lives too! The first impulse to that was given me, perhaps, by Dickens's 'Edwin Drood', so impressive a book because no one knows its end - but I shall never now lose the belief that cathedrals have a contempt for the 'human beings' who worship in them, or, so often today, pretend to worship in them.

However that may be, and I have certainly both Victor Hugo and Huysmans behind me in my superstition, it was not until I went to Durham that I really learned anything about English cathedral towns. I lived for seven years in Durham, going to the school there as

a day boy. My father was head of a college for training schoolmasters and we lived in a house tacked onto the great ugly main building..... The college stood on a hill and a weedy, neglected, tumbled garden ran from it down to the river. Everything about our house and that garden seemed to me odious and I grew up, through those seven years, discontented, ugly, abnormally sensitive and excessively conceited..... I believed that I was profoundly misunderstood, that people took my pale and pimpled countenance for the mirror of my soul, that I had marvelous things of genius in me that would one day be discovered.....

Behind all this the cathedral hung like a disapproving, snobbish rich relation. I fancied (and I think with some justice) that the cathedral set despised the Walpole family who were connected with incipient schoolmasters instead of retund and elegant canons...

The world of my novels became during this time so real to me that the world of school and cathedral and family faded into thin air.....

All this time I was writing, writing, writing.....

Behind all this romantic nonsense the cathedral's shadow hung. My childish belief that cathedrals had their own secret and mysterious life was confirmed forever during these years. Durham is I suppose one of the world's most beautiful works. Hanging high in air, perfectly proportioned, pearl shadowed and sky defended, it is enough for anyone's romantic dreams. And yet romantic though my mind was, it was not the inspiration of its marvelous beauty but the sinister revengeful spirit of the thing that I seemed most strongly to feel. Built originally for the worship of God, it appeared to me to have become pagan and heretic through its history of blood and crime - yes and still more through the mosaic of small intrigues, plots, and meannesses that through the years had encrusted it.

It had for the most part developed only the worst and most sordid and cynical side of human character and was glad of it. I can still hear the rustle of the silk dresses of some of the ladies of the cathedral set as they walked out, very ostentatiously, before the sermon of some canon whom they personally disliked. Everybody disliked someone; everyone was intriguing against someone else. When a saint like

Bishop Westcott preached I felt that the spirit of the cathedral hated that so good and perfect a man should have his place there. There were many good men, splendid and devout women who served there at one time or another and worshipped God, but the cathedral threw them out when it could.

There was one day when in the middle of the morning Sunday service a madman rushed up the nave, stood on the steps of the choir, and shouted that the cathedral was cursed and would suffer a judgment. As he passed our seat, hustled away by the indignant vergers, I caught a glimpse of his face, satisfied and happy at his protest. He seemed to me less mad than anyone else in the place.....

After such experiences as these, experiences with which his childhood and youth were filled, it is not surprising to find that most of Walpole's work is colored by his impressions of the cathedral. In fact, he is doubly entitled to be called a "cathedral novelist," first because of his group of novels centering around Polchester and the Cathedral, and then because of the traces of the influence of his cathedral life which appear even in his earliest work.

The Wooden Horse (1909) gives us a hint of the mysterious power of Cornwall, amounting almost to an independent existence, a feeling inspired no doubt by Walpole's belief in the mysterious and dominating life of the cathedral. The same theme is developed more fully in Maradick at Forty (1910), Fortitude (1913), and The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair (1925). In The Prelude to Adventure (1912).

there is a sustained atmosphere of gloom, of questioning suspense which seeks the true significance of life and death. The Golden Scarecrow (1915) is almost purely philosophical. Then there is Russia, the Russia which Walpole has captured and interpreted in The Dark Forest (1916) and The Secret City (1919), and which he could not have loved so well had he not been unusually sensitive to the hidden spirit of places. There is danger undoubtedly of overestimating the influence of the cathedral, of forgetting that Mr. Walpole's own genius is probably responsible for most of his work. Nevertheless, if we are willing to trust his own statements at all, it seems fairly certain that his cathedral experiences have lead to much of the seriousness of attitude and the searching for hidden meanings which permeate his novels.

It is the purpose of this study, therefore, not merely to analyze Walpole's small group of "cathedral novels" but to consider all of his work as that of a twentieth century "cathedral novelist."

## CHAPTER ONE

## POLCHESTER AND ITS CATHEDRAL

The most direct proof of the profound influence of the English cathedral on Walpole's work is the fact that he has created for himself a whole cathedral town with its own cathedral. This town, Polchester, is the scene of a group of novels, Jeremy (1919), Jeremy and Hamlet (1923), Jeremy at Crale (1927), The Old Ladies (1924), The Cathedral (1922), and Harmer John (1926). All of these are concerned with the life of the cathedral town, and with the cathedral itself.

However, before we attempt any discussion of this cathedral of Walpole's, let us take another look at The Crystal Box. Mr. Walpole has written an entire chapter describing the creation of Polchester, the surrounding country, and the Cathedral itself, and giving us some idea of their sources. So lest we should be tempted to make too many sweeping generalizations of our own as to these matters, it is well to have Walpole's own statements clearly in mind.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Crystal Box, VI: Glebeshire, Bookman 57, pp. 39 ff.

I cannot remember when I was not fascinated by maps. And my favorite game for a long period was to shut my eyes and plant my thumbs blindly onto some spot in the universe, and discover then how to get there. My journeys were many and fantastic.

I wearied then of a reality which I could never attain..... It came to me one day that I would much more nearly reach my country did I have one all my own, kept from me neither by slenderness of purse nor an exasperating ill sequence of Continental trains. Invent a country I did, and with the country a train service, and with the train service a system of counties and states, and with the counties and states town laws and county councilors, a social system, a Royal Family and an Ancient Lineage.....

I did not, so far as I remember, draw another map that I might dwell in until my year in Liverpool when.....in addition to my labors as a missionary, my first novel "The Abbey" was begun - that novel that was to appear twenty years later as "The Cathedral."

The town of whose life, spiritual and material, the Abbey was the chief glory existed from the first so vividly in my mind that I must draw a picture of it; and it was from that picture, I suppose, that Polchester ultimately derived. I gave the streets names, rebuilt the Town Hall, and put up a statue to a Crimean general in the market place.

Polchester soon began to have an astonishing vitality in my mind. I have been asked on many occasions as to its real origin and I can only say that it had no origins. Something of Truro is in it, something of Durham, but in truth it is nakedly Polchester and nowhere else at all.

For some years it was only the Cathedral and its environs that I had at all minutely investigated. The cathedrals of fiction in my memory are not very many. There is that one that veiled the mystery of Edwin Drood, and in spite of Dickens's genius it remains I think less as a cathedral than as a background for the wicked Jasper's plots and plans. There is the wonderful Notre Dame of Victor Hugo, there is

the Glasgow Cathedral in "Rob Roy" - and there is Barchester. After the publication of my own "Cathedral" I had of course Trollope thrown up at me a good deal - but I may say not so much as I had expected.

No one will ever beat me in the race of Trollopians. "Barchester Towers" was one of the first novels I ever read and I will not be able to say how many times I have reread it since that first thrilling occasion. But of all the many impressions that "Barchester Towers" and its companion volumes make upon me the actual Cathedral itself is one of the least vivid. I don't see Barchester Cathedral although I have the best will in the world to do so and, curiously enough, I have never seen a picture of it. There have been many Trollope illustrators. Not one of them so far as I know has ever made an illustration of the Cathedral - which goes to prove, I think, that the Cathedral itself is not important.

There is one modern cathedral in English fiction of which I must speak for a moment and that is the cathedral in a book called "The Nebuly Coat" by Meade Falkner.....

Here too the religious aspect of the subject is underemphasized. It is horror, anticipation, rich romance that we feel. "The Nebuly Coat" is no cousin at all either to Mr. Huysmans or Mrs. Humphry Ward, but it is a splendid creation and should not be forgotten. I had, I suppose, something of all these buildings in my mind when Polchester came out of the mists, but I don't know that any of them very deeply influenced me. The best description of a church that I have ever read anywhere is in the beginning of Mr. Proust's "Swann" novel, but I read that for the first time only last year.

When my cathedral was there before me and Canon's Yard and Bodger's Street and the Precincts, I began to look at the rest of the town. The High Street did borrow something from Durham, I must confess, just as Orange Street owes something to the Lemon Street of Truro - but Polchester first had its concrete evidence in the pages of "Jeremy", and his quarters at the top of Orange Street had very little to do with the Cathedral. Gradually I penetrated



down the hill and with the discovery of Sea Town my vision of the city was complete. Sea Town suddenly became to me of the greatest importance. It was connected not only with the love affairs of young Brandon but also with the life and death of Harmer John - and Harmer John I love more than any other character of my heart and brain.

.....It is certain that Glebeshire County soon began to grow in detail, shape, and form widely beyond the walls of Polchester. I am not a careful writer, but if only people knew how desperately muddled a mind I have they would wonder that I ever get anything clear at all. Glebeshire is still clear to me only in spots. It is placed geographically in my mind between Devon and Cornwall, enclosing the southern part of one and the northern of the other. I remember that my friend J.D. Beresford abused me once for calling it Glebeshire, a name as it seemed to him quite unsuited to that southern toe of England. But when I think of the Devonshire and Cornish valleys, so rich and luxuriant, and the lovely lines of the ruddy brown plowed land rising against the deep blue of the Cornish sky, I cannot feel that Glebeshire is an ill name. In any case Glebeshire it is and Glebeshire it will always be.....

There are places in the interior of Glebeshire that are still dim to me like those blank places in ancient maps. But there are enough stories already here to last me a lifetime. But can't you tell any cheerful ones? I think "Jeremy" and "The Green Mirror" and "The Young Enchanted" are cheerful. But Glebeshire is I think a grim country - beautiful, astoundingly, but strange, foreign, remote in its spirit.

The valleys are warm and colored but they seem to be there on protest. Polchester has many a gay and happy time - it is a sleepy place today and sleepy places are I suppose happy. But Polchester is not Glebeshire. No, not by a long way. I have a fancy that one day the sea will come sweeping over that thin peninsula and will flood the streets and creep up the hill and waves will beat against the windows of the Cathedral and only the rock will remain, jagged and gaunt, and the sea gulls will flock to it and build their nests there.

As Walpole says, Polchester "is not Glebeshire." Nor is any of the cathedral towns of Walpole's childhood, although it may resemble them in some respects. It is Polchester itself, and after reading a few of Mr. Walpole's novels it seems as real as London or any other town in England. In every story we find the same shops on the same streets, the same people at the same kind of parties, for these people are the residents of Polchester and belong there. The town is not merely a setting for a group of novels; it is a town which Walpole knows and loves and which seems the natural place for him to write about.

We find Polchester mentioned for the first time in The Dark Forest. There is nothing definite as to location or topography, but it is distinctly the same Polchester that we learn to know in later books. John Trenchard, the young Englishman, says: "There are Trenchards all over Glebeshire, you know, lots of them. In Polchester, our cathedral town, where I was born, there are at least four Trenchard families. Then in Truxie, at Garth, At Rasselas, at Clinton - but why should I bother you with all this? It's only to tell you that the Trenchards are simply Glebeshire for ever and ever. To a Trenchard, anywhere in the world, Glebeshire is hearth and home.....and whatever happens, wherever a

Trenchard goes, he always really takes Glebeshire with him. I was born in Polechester, as I said. My father had a little property there, but we always lived in a little round bow-windowed house in the Cathedral Close. I was simply brought up on the Cathedral. From my bedroom windows I looked on the whole of it. In our drawing-room you could hear the booming of the organ. I was always watching the canons crossing the cathedral green, counting the strokes of the cathedral bell, listening to the cawing of the cathedral rooks, smelling the cathedral smell of cold stone, wet umbrellas and dusty hassocks, looking up at the high tower and wondering whether anywhere in the world there was anything so grand and fine. My moral world, too, was built on the cathedral - on the cathedral 'don'ts' and 'musts', on the cathedral hours and the cathedral prayers, and the cathedral ambitions and disappointments. My father's great passion was golf. He was not a religious man. But my mother believed in the cathedral with a passion that was almost a disease. She died looking at it. Her spirit is somewhere round it now, I do believe.<sup>2</sup>"

In The Green Mirror and The Young Enchanted, which deal almost entirely with the Trenchard family, Polechester is mentioned many times. It is with the London

Trenchards that the stories are concerned, and the Trenchards of Polchester enter merely as passing figures, but we are fully aware that such a town as Polchester in Glebe-shire exists and that it is a delightful place in which to live.

The first actual appearance of Polchester, as Mr. Walpole tells us in The Crystal Box, is in Jeremy. The Coles, Jeremy's family, lived in "a large stone house at the top of the right-hand side of Orange Street."<sup>3</sup> When the children went out for a walk, they went "straight down Orange Street, straight again through the Market, past the Assembly Rooms and the Town Hall,.....up the High Street, into the cobble-stones of the Close, whence one could look down, between the houses on to the orchards, round the Cathedral with the meadows, Pol Meads sloping down to the river, so through Orchard Lane into Orange Street once again."<sup>4</sup> We read also that "beyond the little iron gate of the garden.....was the top of Orange Street; then down the hill on the right was the tower of his father's church; exactly opposite the gate was the road that led to the orchards, and on the right of that was the Polchester

3. Jeremy, page 11

4. Ibid., page 28

High School for Young Ladies....."<sup>5</sup>

There are other scattered bits of information as to the topography of Polchester to be found in Jeremy. The "old houses that run in a half-moon round the Close, and fact the green sward and the great western door of the Cathedral,"<sup>6</sup> are mentioned several times. Jeremy and his sisters "walked around the Close and reached the back of the Cathedral."<sup>7</sup> "The Meads fall in a broad green slope from the old Cathedral battlement down to the River Pol. Their long stretches of meadow are scattered with trees, some of the oldest oaks in Glebeshire, and they are finally bounded by the winding path of the Rope Walk that skirts the river bank. Along the Rope Walk in March and April the daffodils first, and the primroses afterwards, are so thick that, from the Cathedral walls, the Rope Walk looks as though it wandered between pools and lakes of gold."<sup>8</sup>

The only clew to direction which we find, aside from the mention of the West doors of the cathedral facing the Close, is the statement that "High Street is, of course, the West End of Polchester."<sup>9</sup>

5. Ibid., page 39

6. Ibid., page 146

7. Ibid., page 33

8. Ibid., page 118

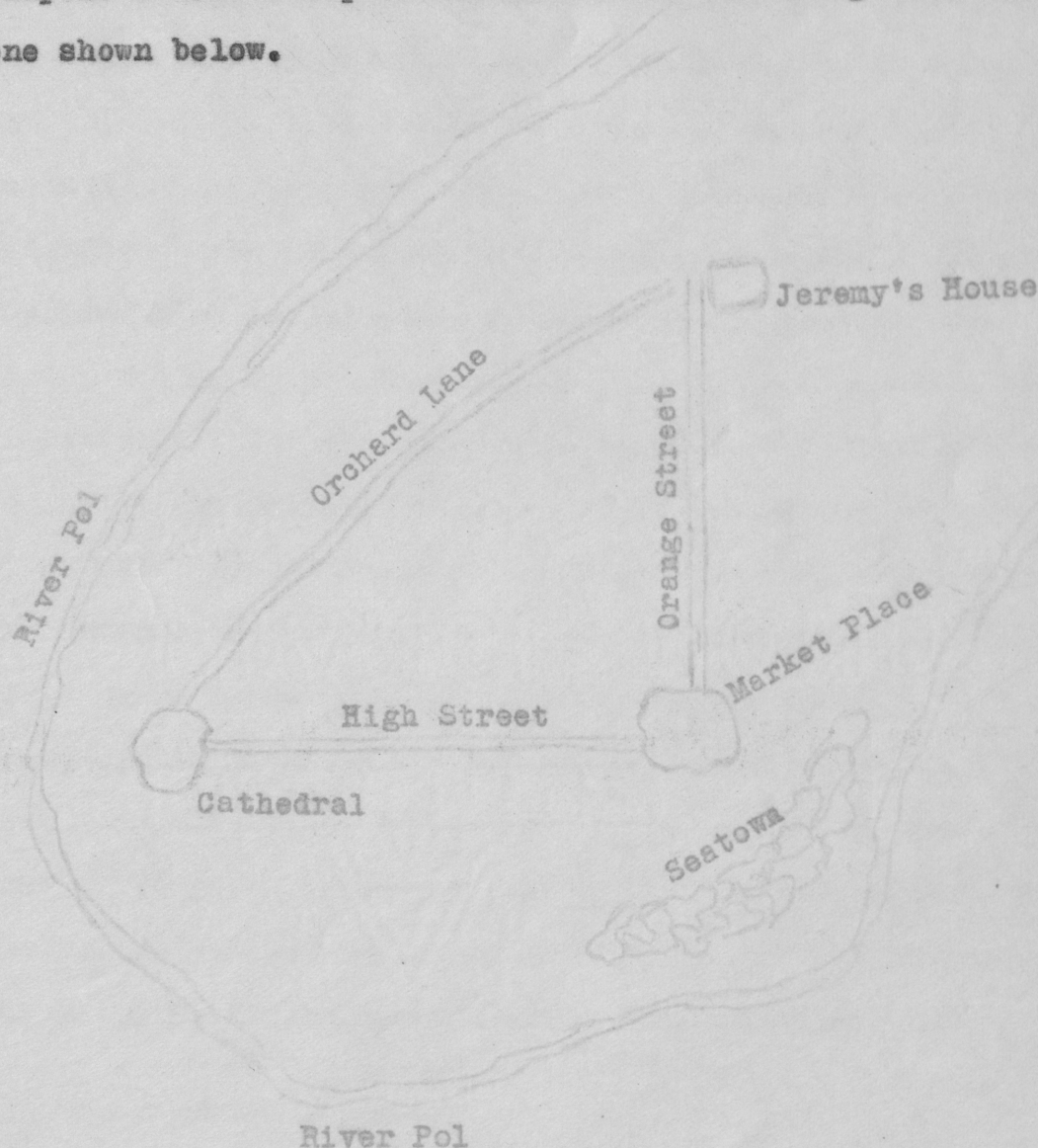
9. Ibid., page 291

The first page of Jeremy and Hamlet gives a description of the view from a basement window of the Coles' house, "down over orange Street and, obliquely, sharp to the right and past the Polchester High School, a glimpse of the Cathedral towers themselves."<sup>10</sup>

All this is plenty of information to give us a sense of reality as we follow the fortunes of Jeremy and the other young Coles. The old stone house, and the view down Orange Street from the windows and the garden are almost as familiar to us as to the children. However, it is difficult to get a very clear view of Polchester as a whole from these descriptions. We know that from the top of Orange Street we can go straight down the street to the Market Place and thence into the High Street. But we have no idea as to whether Orange Street runs north and south or east and west; and whether it is in a line with the High Street on the other side of the Market Place, or parallel with it, or whether the two streets are at right angles, or some other angle, with each other.

The only thing that gives us any light is the statement that from the Cathedral at the end of High Street and the Close one can walk through Orchard lane into Orange Street again, and the "road that leads to the orchards is exactly opposite Jeremy's gate. Therefore,

since the High Street, which leads to the Cathedral, is "the West end of Polchester;" and since, if one is to return to Orange Street from the Cathedral through Orchard lane, Orange Street can hardly be a continuation of or even parallel with High Street, it is quite probable that Walpole's mental map of Polchester is something like the one shown below.



The Cathedral gives us a little clearer idea of the plan of Polchester. When the Archdeacon wanted to visit the Dean he had to go from his home in the Precincts "down the High Street and then to the left up Orange Street."<sup>11</sup> "Orange Street was the street of the doctors, the solicitors, the dentists, the bankers, and the wealthier old maids of Polchester. The grey stone was of a charming age, the houses with their bow-windows, their pillared porches, their deep set doors, their gleaming old-fashioned knockers"<sup>12</sup> were reminiscent of an earlier day. We become familiar with the Precincts also in The Cathedral, the little houses around the Cathedral with their shining brass knockers and tidy appearance. Then there is Canon's Yard behind the Cathedral, "a little square, shut-in, cobbled place with tall, thin houses closing it in and the Cathedral towers overhanging it."<sup>13</sup> All of Polchester is "built, as it were, on the side of a rock, running finally to a flat top, on which is the Cathedral. Down the side of the rock there are broad ledges, and it is on one of these that the market-place is built. At the bottom of the rock lies the jumble of cottages known most erroneously as Seatown, and round the rock runs the river Pol, slipping away at

11. The Cathedral, page 69

12. Ibid., page 120

13. Ibid., page 128



last through woods and hills and valleys into the sea."<sup>14</sup>

It will be noted that Seatown did not appear at all in the pages of Jeremy. And while it is vividly described in The Cathedral, we cannot be quite sure of its location, except that it is probably across the Market Place and down the hill from High Street and Orange Street. We read that "from the river, coming up through the green banks, Seatown looked picturesque, with its disordered cottages scrambling in confusion at the tail of the rock and the Cathedral and Castle nobly dominating it. That distant view is the best thing to be said for Seatown."<sup>15</sup>

When Falk Brandon went to Seatown, he "plunged down into Bridge Street as into a damp stuffy well.....The street, top-tilting down to the river, was slovenly with dirt and carelessness.....Bridge Street tumbled with a dirty absent-mindedness into Pennicent Street. This, the main thoroughfare of Seatown, must have been once a handsome cobbled walk by the river-side."<sup>16</sup>

When Falk returned he is mentioned as "pushing now up the hill into the market-place."<sup>17</sup>

In Harmer John there are other descriptions of Seatown, but its exact plan is still vague. However, we know enough for our purpose when we see it as a chaotic

14. Ibid., page 54

15. Ibid., page 99

16. Ibid., page 99

17. Ibid., page 107

jumble of old buildings on the opposite side of Polchester from the Cathedral, down along the river Pol.

In The Old Ladies we are introduced to another section of Polchester, Pontippy Square. "Quite a number of years ago there was an old rickety building on the rock above Seatown in Polchester, and it was one of a number in an old grass-grown square known as Pontippy Square." <sup>18</sup> This is practically all that we are told about the place in its relation to Polchester. It was between the Market Place and Seatown, perhaps a trifle closer to the Market Place.

The most noteworthy fact about all these bits of description of Polchester is that they are invariably consistent. There are many places in Polchester that Walpole has never described. However, the ones which he has presented to his readers are so clearly located that Polchester as a whole seems more real than it would if he had described numerous places in great detail in various novels, no one place having any connection with any of the others. The entire town appears in each book, and there is not a contradictory statement from beginning to end. Walpole writes, in other words, as though Polchester were a real town, as indeed it is to him, not as though it were merely a convenient scene for his novels.

The most outstanding feature of Polchester is always and unalterably the Cathedral. Since Jeremy is essentially the story of one small boy, we do not find much description of the Cathedral except as it affects him. There is the paragraph mentioned above which speaks of the Close with its cobblestones and the half-moon of old houses running around it and facing the great west doors of the Cathedral. We learn that the Cathedral is on the very top of the rock on which Polchester is built, and that the Meads fall down from the rocky summit to the River Pol. Then on the occasion of Jeremy's first visit to the Cathedral alone we are given some idea of its interior, but this passage is mostly a record of vague impressions. Walpole is more interested in the effect of the Cathedral upon Jeremy than in the Cathedral itself. "The Cathedral was utterly quiet. The vast nave, stained with reflections of purple and green and ruby, was vague and unsubstantial, all the little wooden chairs huddled together to the right and left, leaving a great path that swept up to the High Altar under shafts of light that fell like searchlights from the windows. The tombs and the statues peered dimly from the shadow, and the great east end window, with its deep purple light seemed to draw the whole nave up into its heart and hold it there."

In Jeremy and Hamlet there is a similar description, when Jeremy again slips into the Cathedral alone. "Afternoon service.....was just ending. Two or three people.....came slowly down the nave, paused for a moment to look at the garrison window with the Christ and the little children, and went out through the west end door .....He walked down the side aisle looking at every tablet, every monument, every window, with a new interest.....He reached the side chapel where was the tomb of the Black Bishop. There he lay, safely enclosed behind the golden grill, his gauntleted hands folded on his chest, his spurs on his heels, angels supporting his head, and grim defiance on his face... Jeremy stared and stared and stared again. About him and around him and above him the cathedral seemed to grow vaster and vaster."

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Walpole's conception of the Palchester Cathedral becomes clearer and more detailed as time goes on, however, and in The Cathedral we find many descriptions both of its exterior and interior, which enable us to understand its plan without difficulty.

The Polchester Cathedral, as we have already seen, is set on the very top of the huge rock upon which the town is built. From the window of Saint James Rectory, near the foot of Orange Street, "the great building seemed to be perched on the very edge of the rock, almost, you felt, swinging in mid-air, and that so precariously that with one push of the finger you might send it staggering into space."<sup>20</sup> It is this location, combined with its massive structure and the two great, overshadowing west towers, which gives the cathedral that menacing, lowering aspect which is its most marked characteristic.

One may enter the Cathedral by the west<sup>21</sup> door between the two great western towers, or by a small side door known as Saint Margaret's Door which<sup>22</sup> leads into the corner of the Saint Margaret Chapel. The west door is the public one; at least we find no instance of anyone save the dignitaries of the church using the Saint Margaret's Door. Let us then enter the Cathedral by the door at the west. As we stand in the nave, the first impression is of vastness, and especially of tremendous length. "Polchester has the largest cathedral in northern Europe" and "it is certainly true

20. The Cathedral, page 60

21. Ibid., page 109

22. Ibid., page 16

that no other building in England gives the same overwhelming sense of length." <sup>23</sup> The nave has ten bays, and the great columns rise superbly unbroken to the roof. Most of the time the nave, like that of many English cathedrals, seems "cold and deserted." There are times, however, when the sunlight is reflected at just the right angle through the great windows in the west and east ends, that the entire cathedral takes on an air of mystery in the multicolored light.

In the matter of windows, Walpole is not quite clear. For instance we are not quite sure whether the Rose Window is at the west or the east. He speaks of the west window as a "great rose-colored circle." Yet several times he mentions the purple and violet lights that fall from the east window. And in Harmer John we have definite mention of the "great Rose window at the East end." It may be, to be sure, that the west window is not really a Rose Window, but merely has enough rose-colored glass to give it a rosy hue. Or it may be that there are two

Rose Windows in the Polchester Cathedral. However, most of the English Cathedrals have only one Rose Window, which is at the west end. At any rate, it is quite certain that Walpole's cathedral does have two large and beautiful windows, and that one of them is a Rose Window.

In addition to these two large windows, there is another group at one side which is especially lovely. These windows are known as "The Virgin and the Children," and they are "with the exception of the great Rose window... the oldest in the Cathedral. In one of them the Virgin Mary, in a purple gown, bent down over a field of lilies to watch the baby Christ at play; in another the Christ and Saint John paddled in a stream while Mary watched them from the windows of a crooked house set in a cup of hills; in another, children were running in a crowd after a white kid and Mary held back her Son, who stretched out his arms after his playmates; in another, Joseph was in the workshop, Jesus was sitting on the floor looking up, and the Virgin, in a dress of vivid green, stood over him, guarding him; in another, they were walking, Father, Mother and Child, up the steps of the Temple, watched by a group of grave old men; in another, Jesus was playing at his Mother's feet, while an ox, an ass and three strange dogs with large black eyes<sup>24</sup> seemed to be protecting them."

One of the most impressive features of the Cathedral is the Black Bishop's Tomb. According to Walpole, in a guide book to English cathedrals there appears this description: "It stands between the pillars at the far east end of the choir in the eighth bay from the choir screen.

The stone screen which surrounds the tomb is of most elaborate workmanship, and it has, in certain lights, the effect of delicate lace; the canopy over the tomb has pinnacles which rise high above the level of the choir-stalls. The tomb itself is made from a solid block of a dark blue stone. The figure of the bishop, carved in black marble, lies with his hands folded across his breast, clothed in his Episcopal robes and mitre, and crozier on his shoulder. At his feet are a vizor and a pair of gauntlets, these also carved in black marble. On one finger of his right hand is a ring carved from some green stone. His head is raised by angels and at his feet beyond the vizor and gauntlets are tiny figures of four knights fully armed. A small arcade runs round the tomb with a series of shields in the spaces, and these shields have his motto, 'God giveth Strength', and the arms of the See of Polchester. His epitaph in brass round the edge of the tomb has thus been translated:

Here, having surrendered himself back to God, lies Henry of Arden. His life, which was distinguished for its great piety, its unfailing generosity, its noble statesmanship, was rudely taken in the nave of this Cathedral by men who feared neither the punishment of their fellows nor the just vengeance of an irate God.

He died, bravely defending this great house of Prayer, and is now, in eternal happiness, fulfilling the reward of all good and faithful servants, at his Master's side." 25



Near the Black Bishop's tomb is the Monument to Henry, Eighth Marquis of Brytte. This, with the exception of the windows of the Virgin and the Children, is considered by some the loveliest thing in the Cathedral, with the "babies crowding at the head and feet of the recumbent figure - the loveliest babies, some laughing, some grave, one with his finger on his lips, one looking back, calling to his friend, two bending forward, their chubby fingers on one another's shoulders - adorable, adorable babies making perfect the delicacy of the lace-like background, the strength and dignity of the simple figure, the symmetry and pattern of the wings of the guarding angel."

"The history of that monument," writes Walpole, "was a strange one. Henry, Eighth Marquis of Brytte, the last of his family, the oldest perhaps of all Glebeshire's great families, spent the last years of his long life at Brytte Court, ten miles from Polchester, and died in 1735. He had done many things during his lifetime for our town, which he loved, and, of course, we gave him a monument. A curious thing happened. A local artist was discovered, a young man Simon Petre, a protege of the old Marquis, who, learning of the boy's talent, had sent him to London, Paris, and finally to Italy. He came back a sculptor of fine promise. His benefactor's monument was his first public commission. He worked at it for a year and a half,

and died of some queer fever a week or two after finishing  
 it." <sup>26</sup>

Leaving the monuments in the Choir and returning to the Nave, we come to the little door leading to the <sup>27</sup> King Harry Chapel. This is just at the right of the Choir and is separated from it by a screen. Before the screen is a notice saying that the chapel has been set apart for private prayer and that no one who is found there in meditation should be disturbed. The little chapel itself is very simple and quiet. At the corner there is a little wooden door which opens onto a flight of small, winding stairs. Mounting these, we come to the Whispering Gallery, a narrow platform which extends the entire length of the Chapel and beyond to the opposite tower. From the gallery we climb more winding stairs and at last reach a small, empty room with a wooden floor. One side of the room is open, and one can look down at the entire Cathedral. The dim candles cast a flickering light over the gleaming woodwork, and brasses. The pillars and buttresses which support the gigantic roof seem more powerful than ever. From no other point within or without the Cathedral is its size and strength more apparent.

Descending the two flights of stairs and pass-

26. Harmer John, page 69

27. The Cathedral, page 109

ing once more through the King Harry Chapel, then through the nave, we enter the Vestry and climb more winding stairs to visit the Lucifer Room. This was one of Archdeacon Brandon's most beloved spots, so perhaps a description of one of his visits there will be a good introduction to the place:

He went in by the Saint Margaret door, crossed through the vestry.....and climbed the little crooked stairs to the Lucifer Room.....The Lucifer Room was a favorite resort of his, favorite because there was a long bare floor across which he could walk with no furniture to interrupt him, and because too, no one ever came there. It was a room in the Bishop's Tower that had come, many hundreds of years ago, been used by the monks as a small refectory. Many years had passed now since it had seen any sort of occupation save that of bats, owls and mice. There was a fireplace at the far end that had long been blocked up, but that still showed curious carving, the heads of monkeys and rabbits, winged birds, a twisting dragon with a long tail, and the figures of a saint holding up a crucifix. Over the door was an old clock that had long ceased to tell the hours; this had a strangely carved wood canopy. Two little windows with faint stained glass gave an obscure light. The subjects of these windows were confused, but the old colours, deep reds and blues, blended with a rich glow that no modern glass could obtain. The ribs and bosses of the vaulting of the room were in faded colours and dull gold. In one corner of the room was an old, dusty, long-neglected harmonium. Against the wall were hanging some wooden figures, large life-sized saints, two male and two female, once outside the building, painted on the wood in faded crimson and yellow and gold. Much of the colour had been worn away with rain and wind, but two of the faces were still bright and stared with a gentle fixed gaze out into the dim air. Two old banners, torn and thin, flapped from one of the vaultings. The floor was worm, and creaked with every step. As Brandon pushed back the heavy door and entered, some bird in a distant corner flew with a frightened stir across to the window. Occasionally some one urged that steps should be taken

to renovate the place and make some use of it, but nothing was ever done. Stories connected with it had faded away; no one now could tell why it was called the Lucifer Room - and no one cared. <sup>28</sup>

The Lucifer Room today is just as it was when Brandon died, except that it is even more faded and dusty.

Returning to the Vestry again from the Lucifer Room we may enter the Chapter House at the right, which is a continuation of the Cloisters. "Little remained now of the original Chapter House which had once been a continuation of Saint Margaret's Chapel. Some extremely fine Early Norman arches which were once part of the Chapter House are still there and may be seen at the southern end of the Cloisters. Here, too, are traces of the dormitory and infirmary which formerly stood there. The present Chapter House consists of two rooms adjoining the Cloisters, once a hall used by the monks as a large refectory. There is still a timber roof of late thirteenth-century work, and this is supposed to have been once part of the old pilgrims' or strangers' hall. The larger of the two rooms is reserved for the Chapter Meetings, the smaller being used for minor meetings and informal discussions." <sup>29</sup>

Mr. Walpole does not say whether the Cloisters, the Chapter House and the Saint Margaret's Chapel are on

28. Ibid., pp. 256-7

29. Ibid., page 142

the north or south. However, he speaks of the afternoon sun flooding the Cloisters;<sup>30</sup> so they could hardly be on the north. He also speaks of entering the Saint Margaret Chapel and turning to the left into the Vestry,<sup>31</sup> which would indicate that he entered from the south side.

It is quite what one would expect of Walpole that he does not enter at all into technical discussions of cathedral architecture, although he gives us such an impressive description of the Cathedral. He does not say what kind of vaulting is used, whether the vaulting is the same all over the building, or whether it is elaborate or simple. We do not know the size or shape of the pillars except that they "rise unbroken" to the roof. Nor do we know the type of architecture represented in the great Western Towers.

It is rather fascinating to speculate on the probable sources of the Polchester Cathedral. Such an investigation, however, does not prove very fruitful. There seem to be practically no traces of any of the cathedrals of fiction which Walpole mentions as having appealed to him especially, unless it be the cathedral of The Nebuly Coat, which volume was not available for this study.

30. Ibid., page 143

31. Ibid., page 16

The cathedrals which Walpole knew as a child, Truro, Canterbury and Durham, have influenced him a little more. The great length of Walpole's cathedral suggests Canterbury, which is one of the longest cathedrals in England, and in fact, in the world. The Cathedral at Durham is perched high up on a rock, as is the one at Polchester, and is approached in the same way by a steep, narrow street winding up from the town. It is also surrounded by a green, similar to the one at Polchester. So it seems fairly safe to say that Walpole was influenced by Durham in choosing the location for his cathedral. The Canterbury Cathedral is also placed upon a hill away from the town, but the hill is not so high, and it is a gentle slope rather than steep, rocky promontory.

Aside from size and location it is difficult to find any direct influence of any of the three cathedrals upon the architecture of the Polchester Cathedral. Both Truro and Canterbury have great Western towers, but they have also a central tower which does not appear at Polchester. They both have rose windows, but so does almost every cathedral in England. Durham has its cloisters and chapter house on the south, as does Polchester, but so do eight other English cathedrals. At Canterbury, however, we do find some very old Norman arches remaining from the old Chapter House, as Walpole tells us they remain at Polchester, but at Canterbury they have been made a part

of the new Library, while at Polchester they remain as they were, distinct from the rest of the building.

Most of Walpole's Cathedral, then, is his own creation. However, this fact is almost more illustrative of the vivid impressions made upon him by the cathedrals at Canterbury, Durham and Truro than if he had made his cathedral a copy of them. Walpole loved cathedrals and cathedral architecture so much that they were a part of his life, and he was capable of conceiving a vast and beautiful cathedral of his own without merely patching together parts of the ones he had seen. It was the spirit of cathedrals which appealed to him, and their architecture was so familiar that he could create a new cathedral as easily as a new character. We shall probably never know all the delightful nooks and corners of the Polchester Cathedral, although we may be introduced to a few more of them in later books. But we do not need to know them all. We have a picture of the Cathedral as a whole, and we know how to reach many of its most beautiful parts, and what to expect in them. So let us enjoy and be satisfied with what Walpole has given us.

## CHAPTER TWO

## WALPOLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CATHEDRAL

After reading Jeremy, Jeremy and Hamlet, The Old Ladies, The Cathedral, and Harmer John, one cannot but have a fairly clear picture of life in a cathedral town. There is permanence and stability about it which is unique. Generations may pass, but the cathedral remains unchanged, dominating with the same autocratic spirit the mortals who happen to surround it.

There are all kinds of people in Polchester: the aristocratic Lady Saint Leath and her son, Johnny, who married Joan Brandon; Archdeacon Brandon, secure in his supremacy and the favor of God and the Cathedral; Mrs. Brandon, outwardly meek and yielding, yet secretly and rebelliously longing for freedom; eccentric Mrs. Combermere, always of an opinion a little different from everyone's else; Canon Ronder, suave, smiling and sophisticated; the Reverend Mr. Cole and his family, typical middle-class clergy; Ellen Stiles, the gossip; Bentinck-Major, the most fastidious and aristocratic of the clergy; Wistons, of Pybus St. Anthony, the almost fanatically sincere rector over whom Brandon and Ronder quarreled;



Tom Longstaffe, the jolliest and most beloved clergyman in Polchester; Longstaffe's daughter Mary who caused serious commotion in the town by returning with her illegitimate child; Hjalmar Johansen (Harmer John), the idealistic young Scandinavian with his dream of beauty; Mrs. Penethen and her daughters, typical of the Polchester lower middle-classes; and Samuel Hogg, the ignorant Lord of Seatown who later extends his power throughout the town. Many of these people have nothing in common and do not even know one another; yet all of them feel the power of the Cathedral. They can see it on the hill above them day and night. The plans of the town are governed by the Cathedral services and the wishes of the officials of the Cathedral. The Cathedral bells ring through all the streets, and penetrate the walls of all the houses. No one can escape their sound.

We have already noted John Trenchard's description of the effect of the Cathedral upon the town and upon his mother. "My mother believed in the cathedral with a passion that was almost a disease." We have also noted the impression which the Cathedral produced upon Jeremy the first time he ventured into it alone. This visit of Jeremy's by the way, is almost identical with some of Walpole's own childhood experiences.

The Cathedral is the story of the effect of the Cathedral upon a group of people, most important among whom is Archdeacon Brandon. At the opening of the story, Brandon is the leading figure in Polchester. He rules the Cathedral, the town, and his own family. He feels that he is the representative of God and of the Cathedral, and in fact is so nearly their equal that he considers them not as the source of his power but merely as sharers in it. He rejoices in his triumph, sincerely believing that he is rendering the greatest possible service to God, to man, and to the Cathedral.

Then, gradually his power begins to break. His pride is severely injured by having his idolized son sent down from Cambridge. Nor does it help to sooth his feelings when this son, Falk, runs away with Annie Hogg, the daughter of Samuel Hogg, the ignorant tavern keeper of Seatown. In the meantime a new element of dissention has been introduced among the Cathedral clergy by the advent of Canon Ronder. Ronder's power gradually increases, and Brandon's is diminished, until at last when even the Archdeacon's wife deserts him, he becomes almost insane. At the last Chapter Meeting, when the most important question of the season, the succession to Pybus St. Anthony, is decided against him, the shock is too great, and he dies, imploring his colleagues to forgett

him if they like but to preserve the traditions of the Cathedral.

Brandon was not a wicked man, not even a weak man. While he was conceited, we do not for a moment doubt his strength or his sincerity. We simply feel the greater strength of the Cathedral which can so completely dominate a man that he loses his own personality in his devotion to it. "His fault in the matter," says Walpole, "was, perhaps, that he took it all too simply, that he regarded these men and the other figures in Polchester exactly as he saw them, did not believe that they could ever be anything else. As God had created the world, so did Brandon create Polchester as nearly in his own likeness as might be - there they all were and there, please God, they would all be for ever."<sup>1</sup>

The Archdeacon had loved the Cathedral so intensely that he came to feel himself almost a part of it. Sometimes during the service his eye would fall upon the tomb of the Black Bishop, and "he seemed to enter into the very tomb and share in the Bishop's dust. 'I stood beside you,' he might almost have cried, 'when in the last savage encounter you faced them on the very steps of the altar.'"<sup>2</sup>

1. The Cathedral, page 69

2. Ibid., page 21

When Falk left him, he went in his grief to the Cathedral as the only place which could give him comfort. Alone in the Lucifer Room "he fancied that the old saints looked at him with kindly affection,"<sup>3</sup> and he went forth strengthened.

The Cathedral itself was soon to turn against him, however. On that ill-fated Jubilee night when he was crushed by the desertion of his wife, "the Cathedral rose from the darkness, triumphant in gold and fire."<sup>4</sup> Its power was not broken. The next evening, he went once more alone to the Cathedral, hoping vainly for some relief. "The Cathedral was very dark, and he stumbled about, knocking against pillars and hassocks. He was strange here. It was as though he didn't know the place. He got into the middle of the nave, and positively he didn't know where he was. A faint green light glimmered in the East end. There were chairs in his way. He stood still, listening. He was lost. He would never find his way out again. His Cathedral, and he was lost! Figures were moving everywhere. They jostled him and said nothing. The air was thick and hard to breathe. Here was the Black Bishop's Tomb. He let his fingers run along the metal work. How cold it was! His hand touched the cold icy beard! His hand stayed there. He could not remove

3. Ibid., page 258

4. Ibid., page 405

it. His fingers stuck. He tried to cry out and he could say nothing. An icy hand, gauntleted, descended upon his and held it. He tried to scream. He could not. He shouted. His voice was a whisper. He sank upon his knees. He fainted, slipping to the ground like a man tired out. There, half an hour later, Lawrence found him.<sup>5</sup>

It is natural perhaps that others, who did not love, and who did not trust, the Cathedral so much, should feel more clearly its sinister power, and thus more nearly escape it. Joan Brandon had always felt its dominating force. "She did not know why, but she had always been afraid of the Cathedral. She had never loved it, and had always wished that they could go on Sundays to some little church like St. James. For most of her conscious life the Cathedral had hung over her with its dark, menacing shadow, forbidding her, as it seemed to her, to be gay or happy or careless. To-day the thought suddenly came to her, 'That place is going to do us harm. I hate it.'<sup>6</sup>"

That same afternoon, when she was with Mr. Morris, a clergyman who had recently come to Polchester, the same feeling came over them both:

"Do you like the Cathedral?" asked Joan.

5. Ibid., page 445

6. Ibid., page 45

"It's wonderful," he replied.

"Oh, I hate it...," cried Joan. "It doesn't care what happens to us."

"Why should it?" he answered. "Think of all it's seen...We can do what we like and it will remain just the same."

"People could come and knock it down," Joan said.

"I believe it would still be there if they did. The rock would be there and the spirit of the Cathedral.....What do people matter beside a thing like that? Why, we're ants....I think I know what you mean about fearing it." 7

Falk, seemingly careless, matter-of-fact youth that he was, felt the same menace. He said to Ronder, "When I was a small boy the Cathedral used to terrify me and dominate me too. I believed in God then, of course, and I used to creep in and listen, expecting to hear Him speak. That tomb of the Black Bishop seemed to me the place where he'd most likely be, and I used to fancy sometimes that He did speak from the heart of that stone. But I daresay it was the old Bishop himself. Anyway I determined long ago that the Cathedral has a life of its own, quite apart from any of us. It has more immortality in one stone of its nave than we have in all our bodies." 8

7. Ibid., pp.59-61

8. Ibid., page 235

Later, in his room, having firmly decided to leave Polchester forever, "he fancied, as he looked out of his window, that the Cathedral also was aware and, aloof, immortal, awaited the inevitable hour."<sup>9</sup>

Looking back at the Cathedral from the Common, he remembered that "when he was a boy it had seemed to him that the Cathedral was like a giant lying down behind the hill.....So it looked now, its towers like ears, the great East window shining, a stupendous eye, out over the bending wind-driven country.....Mightily it looked across the expanse of the moor, staring away and beyond Falk's little body into some vast distance, wrapped in its own great dream, secure in its mighty memories, intent upon its own secret purposes."<sup>10</sup>

According to Canon Foster, the trouble with Polchester was that everyone had forgotten God in their loyalty to the Cathedral.

"I have not been here long enough," said Foster, "to think of working in with anybody. And I don't wish to take sides. There's my duty to the Cathedral. I shall work for that and let the rest go."

"There's your duty to God," replied Foster. "That's the thing that everybody here's forgotten." <sup>11</sup>

9. Ibid., page 240

10. Ibid., page 248

11. Ibid., page 131

Wistons expressed the same sentiment some months later. "I care only for Jesus Christ. He is overshadowed now by all the great buildings that men have raised for Him. He is lost to our view; we must recover Him. Him! Him! Only Him!....And now He is hard to come to, harder every year.....It's the Cathedral, Ronder, that I fear. Don't you yourself sometimes feel that it has, by now, a spirit of its own, a life, a force that all the past years and all the worship that it has had have given it? Don't you even feel that? That it has become a god demanding his own rites and worshippers? That it uses men for its own purposes, and not for Christ's? That almost it hates Christ? It is so beautiful, so lovely so haughty, so jealous! For I, thy God, am a jealous God...I could love Christ better in that garden than in the Cathedral. Tear it down and build it up again! Can you be happy and comfortable and at ease, when you see what Christ might be to human beings and what He is? Who thinks of Him, who cares for Him?....Why is something always in the way....? Love! Charity! Doesn't such a place as this Cathedral breed hatred and malice and pride and jealousy? And isn't its very beauty a contempt? And now what right have you to help my appointment to Pybus?"



Wistons was right in saying that Ronder had no right to help in his appointment. For Ronder was one of those who would always stand by the Cathedral, not because of any passionate devotion to it, such as Brandon's, but because the Cathedral represented convention, social and political prestige, and Ronder was first of all self-seeking. He could gain power through the Cathedral; so he would support it. Because of this selfishness and worldliness, Ronder fared better at the hands of the Cathedral than did those who cared for it. However, even at the time of the events of Harmer John, his power was beginning to weaken, and in time he might be as completely crushed as the Archdeacon.

Suggestive of the mad man whom Walpole describes in The Crystal Box is the artist, Davray, who constantly intruded his uncouthness upon the respectable residents of Polchester. His first appearance is when he induced Falk Brandon to accompany him into the Cathedral to visit the King Harry Chapel. "And it's men like your father," he exclaimed suddenly to Falk, looking down into the Nave, "who think that this place is theirs...Theirs! Presumption! But they'll get it in the neck for that. This place can bide its time. Just when you think you're its master it turns and stamps you out. You wait and see. It amuses me to see your governor walking up the

choir on Sundays as though he owned the place. Owned it! Well, he'll get out. They all have who've tried his game. Owned it!" Then a little later, as though lost in thought he whispered. "You wonderful place! You beautiful place! You've ruined me, but I don't care. You can do what you like with me. You wonder! You wonder!"<sup>13</sup>

A little later, Brandon met Davray in the Cathedral one night, drunken and angry.

"Go home!" he commanded him, "Recover your senses and ask God's forgiveness."

"God's forgiveness! That's like your damned cheek" he cried to the Archdeacon. "Who wants forgiveness as you do? Ask this Cathedral - ask it whether I have not loved it, adored it, worshipped it as I've worshipped no woman. Ask it whether I have not been faithful, drunkard and sot as I am. And ask what it thinks of you - of your patronage and pomposity and conceit. When have you thought of the Cathedral and its beauty, and not always of yourself and your grandeur? Why, man, we're sick of you, all of us, from the top man in the place to the smallest boy. And the Cathedral is sick of you and your damned conceit, and is going to get rid of you, too, if you won't go of yourself. And this is the first step. Your son's gone with a whore to London, and all the town's laughing at you. I've been waiting for this moment for years....Your very pride has been an insult to the God you pretend to serve. I don't know whether there's a God or no - there can't be, or things wouldn't happen as they do - but there is this place, alive, wonderful, beautiful, triumphant, and you've dared to put yourself above it... I could have shouted for joy last night when I heard what your young hopeful had done. 'That's right' I said, 'that'll bring him down a bit. That'll teach him modesty.' I had an extra drink on the strength of it. I've been hanging about all the morning to get a chance of speaking to you.

I followed you up here. You're one of us now, Archdeacon. You're down on the ground at last, but not as low as you will be before the Cathedral has finished with you." 14

Davray's prophecies, needless to say, came true. The tragedy of the whole affair was that everyone, like the mad artist, blamed Brandon for it all. Nobody thought of blaming the Cathedral, except perhaps Joan. No one realized that it was not the real Brandon, but the man whom the Cathedral had made of the real Brandon, who had gone so far in his pride that he must inevitably be crushed. For years, in Polchester, the name of Archdeacon Brandon stood for tyranny, conceit, and unprogressiveness. He had been guilty of all those sins, but was more to be pitied than hated, for it was the Cathedral which from the first was responsible for it all.

In Harmer John, which may be considered a sequel to The Cathedral, the eternal stability of the Cathedral in the midst of changing conditions is again manifested. At the end of The Cathedral, Ronder had practically succeeded to the supremacy formerly held by Brandon. He was the representative of the progressive spirit of the day, and was regarded as the ideal leader for Polchester. In the course of a few years, however, we find all this changed.

Hjalmar Johanson, or Halmer John, as he was called by the more ignorant of the Polcastrians, arrived full of ardent enthusiasm to make Polchester a place of beauty by means of physical and mental culture. The Cathedral inspired him because of its beauty of architecture and decoration. Instead of being a symbol of spiritual power, it was to him a symbol of aesthetic beauty.

At first, Halmer John was hailed as the savior of Polchester. The Cathedral set, including Ronder, adopted him as their protege. His lectures were crowded. His classes were also crowded. He was called in by several of the most distinguished dignitaries of the Cathedral for private instruction and treatment. His chief ambition was to induce the people of the town to destroy Seatown and build a new, sanitary village in its place.

Johanson's ideals, however, were too high for Polchester to grasp quickly. He offended the townspeople in various ways, and they turned against him. One of his chief enemies is Samuel Hogg, who had been influential in Brandon's downfall and was then more powerful than ever. Little by little Johanson became disillusioned, but he still stayed on, though his classes were almost deserted and the whole town was against him. At last, while visiting a dying woman in Seatown one evening, he was killed by a party of ruffians inspired by

Hogg.

He had started the new spirit in Polchester, however, and seven years after his untimely death, Seatown was torn down, a new and clean, though ugly, group of houses built in its stead, and the City of Polchester proclaimed a celebration and erected a memorial tablet in honor of Hjalmar Johanson.

So as the age of Brandon passed, so did the age of Ronder. And doubtless, as time goes on, so also will pass the age of Hjalmer John. But the Cathedral remains the same.

Walpole makes us feel throughout both of these books that he knows everything there is to know about cathedral towns. He sees all the details of their petty intriguing and absorption in insignificant matters. But neither The Cathedral or Hjalmer John is merely a catalogue of petty intrigues and insignificant matters, for Walpole sees behind all these and makes us realize the powerful forces which are leading men on and on, unknown to and in spite of themselves. It is not with the tiresome details of the life of cathedral society that we are concerned; it is with the effect of the cathedral upon that society. It is a commonplace little incident, no doubt, to have the elephant in a circus procession seize the Archdeacon's hat and trample upon it, even though it may injure the pride

of the Archdeacon. But even to us it does not seem a small incident, because it is one of the first steps in the fall of the Archdeacon, and we recognize it as such.

We can understand Walpole's attitude toward the cathedral better perhaps by comparing him with Trollope. As he says in The Crystal Box, Trollope's cathedral has not influenced him much, because it has made no impression upon him. Nor does the actual cathedral in Barchester Towers or the other novels of Trollope make much impression upon anyone. We are impressed by the life of the cathedral town, by the characters, and by the political machinations shown in church matters. But the cathedral itself governs these affairs practically not at all. We might almost as well be reading of the doings of people connected with a school, a hospital, or some political organization. We feel that things are so not because there is any spiritual force in the cathedral which rules them but because cathedral towns in England, and English institutions and society as a whole, are thus..

Since Trollope wrote about society several generations before that which Walpole describes, we can hardly make many comparisons between the characters of the two authors. In the manner of approaching these characters, however, we find a decided difference. Trollope presents straightforward pictures, impartially drawn, of people as they are, and as he finds them.

With Walpole, however, characters are always seeking the truth, and are susceptible, even when they do not realize it, to the spiritual forces around them. And the reader is constantly lead to wonder whether or not a man is what he believes he is, or what others believe he is.

To Trollope, the cathedral was a building and an institution of England. To Walpole, it is a living, spiritual force, with an existence just as real, and infinitely more powerful, than that of any human character in his novels. It may be a manifestation of beauty or of gloom, of joy or of fear, of love or of hatred, of hope or of despair, of life or of death; but always it is a manifestation of living power. It is the supreme embodiment of Walpole's religious belief, that it is the hidden force behind life which matters, of whatever nature that force may be.

Dickens has given us a hint of the same conception of the cathedral, as a menacing, evil, background, in Edwin Drood. He, however, has merely used it as an effective background for the sake of creating one atmosphere, in one novel, while Walpole has caught all its varying moods. Then, too, Dickens, as Walpole said of Trollope, was not essentially religious.

Walpole, with his childhood spent among cathedrals and his naturally serious nature, is admirably

fitted to take his place as the leading, if not the only twentieth century cathedral novelist. He probably will not write another novel of cathedral life so saturated with the cathedral itself as The Cathedral, for in this volume he has given us his whole conception of the cathedral and its meaning, but it is possible that he may write other novels of Polchester and cathedral society which even surpass Harmer John. We have, at least, however, these two novels dealing directly with cathedral life, and they are sufficient to show his power, and to give indisputable proof that in considering the work of Hugh Walpole we must also consider the English cathedral.



## CHAPTER THREE

## WALPOLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PLACES

Walpole's belief that "cathedrals had their own secret and mysterious life" and were possessed of an independent power and existence which could be used to work either good or ill to the mortals who came in contact with them, we find manifested throughout his work in a peculiar sensitiveness to the spirit and hidden power of places which he knows well. This is especially true of Cornwall.

In Walpole's first novel, The Wooden Horse (1909), Henry Trojan returns to his home to find Pen-dragon rapidly becoming an ordinary watering place and the old Cornwall being destroyed. In the first fifty pages we are made to feel the mysterious force of Cornwall as Walpole and Henry Trojan feel it. "The House of the Flutes," says the author, "struck the exact note that was in harmony with the colour and surroundings; the emblem of some wild survival from dark ages when that spot had been one of the most uncivilised in the whole of Britain.....And, indeed, there is nothing more curious in the Cornwall of today than this perpetual reminder of past superstitions, dead gods, strange

pathetic survival of heathen ancestry, that is the true Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> Also typical of Cornwall was the little fishing village, Cullin's Cove, just outside Pendragon. "Here traditions were carefully guarded.....Here, 'down-along,' was the old, the true Cornwall -- a land that had changed scarcely at all since those early heathen days that to the rest of the world are dim, mysterious, mythological, but to a Cornishman are as the events of yesterday. High on the moor behind the Cove stand four great rocks - wild, wind-beaten, grimly permanent. It is under their guardianship that the Cove lies, and it is something more than a mere superstitious reverence that these inhabitants of 'down-along' pay to those darkly mysterious figures. Seen in the fading light of the dying day, when Cornish mists are winding and twisting over the breast of the moor, those four rocks seem to take a living shape, to grow in size, and to whisper to those that care to hear old stories of the slaughter that had stained the soil at their feet on an earlier day."<sup>2</sup>

When Henry Trojan goes out of doors on the

1. The Wooden Horse, page 27

2. Ibid., page 289

morning after his arrival, he feels the influence of his surroundings. "Something was stirring within him.....There was waking in him again that strange, half-inherited sense of the eternal presence of ancient days and old heathen ceremonies, and the manners of men who had lived in that place a thousand years before. He had known it when he was a boy....he had sometimes fancied that he saw them, those wild bearded priests of cruelty, waiting smilingly on the silent twilit moor for victims - they had always been cruel in his eyes; something terrible in the very vagueness of their outline. Now the old thoughts came back to him, and he almost fancied that he could see the strange faces in the shadows of the garden and feel their hot breath upon his cheek."

Henry is the only one of his family who loves Cornwall and its traditions, and the inevitable struggle that results is the story of The Wooden Horse, which ends with the fall of the house of Trojan.

Cornwall does not appear in this book, however, as the compelling power that it becomes in some of Walpole's later work. Henry Trojan loves Cornwall because it is his home and because his romantic nature can feel its beauty; but he fights for it and for his own individualism with his own strength, and conquers

with his own strength. The Cornwall which is so powerful that it dominates the lives of all whom it touches appears for the first time in Maradick at Forty (1910).

Maradick goes down to Treliss in Cornwall an ordinary forty year old business man, interested in nothing in particular, unimaginative, bored by and a bore to his wife and friends. Within a few hours the spirit of Cornwall gets into his blood, he is drawn into a delightful and adventurous romance as the friend and advisor of two charming young people, his own imagination is awakened, and he leaves the place a different man.

Nor does Treliss affect Maradick alone.

Mrs. Maradick and the other guests at the hotel also feel its mysterious influence. Some merely grow restless, others uneasy, others irritable. And to none of them does it bring the joy and freedom which Maradick finds. But the spirit is there, all through the story.

"I'm almost afraid of it," says Mrs. Lester.

"It's so very - what shall I say - champagney, that one doesn't know what one will do next. Sometimes one's spirits are so high that one positively longs to be depressed. Why, you'd be amazed at some of the things people, quite ordinary respectable people, do when they are down here." <sup>4</sup> And a little later, she remarks, "There

4. Maradick at Forty, page 135

never was a place more unsettling; whatever you've been before Treliss will make you something different now, and if anything's ever going to happen to you it will happen here." <sup>5</sup>

Almost identical in theme with Maradick at Forty is the Portrait of a Man with Red Hair (1925). One might almost suggest that Walpole felt that he had not done his best work in the earlier book and wanted to try again. The fact that the hero is advised to go to Treliss by Maradick himself is significant and extremely characteristic of Walpole, who likes to keep his whole world of characters constantly alive.

The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair is supremely a story of atmosphere, the atmosphere of fear and the atmosphere of Cornwall, and it is a better story than Maradick at Forty because the atmosphere is more concentrated and more sustained. The minute the hero, Charles Percy Harkness, approaches Treliss he feels a vague presentiment of fear, which increases steadily and rapidly. The old Cornish peasant who meets Harkness on the train gives a vivid expression of Walpole's own feeling for places. "Places have souls just like people. Some have more soul and some have less. And some have none at all. Sometimes a place

will creep away altogether, it is so disgusted with the things people are trying to do to it, and will leave a dummy instead, and only a few know the difference. Why, up in the Welsh hills there are several places that have gone up there in sheer disgust the way they've been treated and left substitutes behind them. Parts of London, for instance. Do you think that's the real Chelsea you see in London? Not a bit of it. The real Chelsea is living - well, I mustn't tell you where it is living - but you'll never find it."<sup>6</sup>

Maradick, when describing Treliss to his friend, says: "Have you ever noticed about places...? If you have the sort of things in you that stir them they produce in their turn their things - and always will for your kind - a sort of secret society."<sup>7</sup>

Walpole's most outstanding characters, it will be noted, usually do seem to "have the kind of things in them that stir" places and are stirred by places. Henry Trojan, James Maradick and Charles Percy Harkness all seem irresistably drawn to Cornwall. But while to Maradick and Harkness Cornwall meant undreamed of, romantic adventure and newly awakened

6. Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, pp. 40-41

7. Ibid., page 32

imagination which lead to a richer life, there are other, grimmer aspects of Cornwall which Walpole loves to depict. We have a hint of them in the Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, in the wild sea coast, the darkness, the cruelty and the fear which pervade the book. However, the whole story is so obviously a fantastic adventure throughout that the general effect is not that Cornwall is terrible but that it is a wonderful place to go if you want to believe that fairy tales can come true.

There is no suggestion of fairy tales in Fortitude(1913). Seaw House in Treliss, Peter Westcott's home, was an old, echoing, damp house that "always smelled of rotten apples." The house and Peter's father, a father so cruel that he seemed part of the cruel house and the cruel country, haunted Peter all through his life, even after he had been for many years in London. "I love the place with all my soul and body," he said to his wife concerning Treliss, "but it is terrifying - almost the only terrifying place that civilization has left to us - South Africa is nothing to it..." And Peter was especially afraid of it because it wouldn't "let him go."<sup>8</sup>

It was to Treliss that Peter went at the end of the story, worn out with discouragements, heart-

broken by the desertion of his wife, back to Treliss to his father to be swallowed up in the nightmare of his childhood again and be dominated once more by the atmosphere of sordid cruelty which pervaded the place. And it was only by the supreme effort of the woman who had loved him quietly for years that he was saved.

Fortitude, besides giving us Walpole's conception of Cornwall in her darker moods, is full of instances of the power and atmosphere of other places. There was a story in one of Henry Galleon's novels which struck Peter's fancy, the story of a man who was afflicted with a disease known as "the Terror of London." This, says Mr. Walpole, was a prelude to Peter's life in London. He thought of it often, the rumbling noises of the city which grew stronger and stronger until they could not be ignored, and which sounded "like some huge animal breathing in his sleep." "What would you say to this old place being alive, taking on a regular existence of its own, don't you know?"<sup>9</sup> At any rate, Peter was at times almost as completely under the spell of London as he had ever been under that of Cornwall.

One of Mr. Walpole's favorite subjects, and one which is perhaps more closely akin to his feeling for



the cathedral itself, is his love for old houses and old rooms. This also appears in Fortitude. After his mother's death, Peter sat uneasily in the huge dining room at Scaw House, opposite his grandfather: "It was indeed with some consciousness of Things that were flinging their shadows on the horizon and were not as yet fully visible to him that he sat there."<sup>10</sup> The whole house was filled with the accumulated oppressiveness of years of misery and inhumanity, like the decaying apples which scented the air.

Then later there is the dusty little bookshop in which Peter spends his first years in London, full of secret plots and intrigues, and above all constantly dim and dark and mysterious.

Quite similar to Scaw House is the rectory at St. Dreots, the home of Maggie in The Captives, except that the prevailing atmosphere here is religion, an unwholesome, hypocritical religion. Religion was also the dominating force in the London house to which Maggie went with her aunts. "It's in the house, it's in the rooms, it's in the very furniture,"<sup>11</sup> she insisted. She felt the hostility of the very smallest objects in the house just as much as that of the most important

10. Fortitude, page 114

11. The Captives, page 111

members of the family. Maggie could not escape from the stifling atmosphere that surrounded her. It had made her aunts inhuman saints. She could feel the very curtains and chairs and walls growing more inimical day by day.

Perhaps the most subtle place-atmosphere which Mr. Walpole has captured is that of Russia. As he says in The Crystal Box, he did not really know Russia, he merely loved it so much that he wished to record his impressions. Yet while he did not have time to become intimately acquainted with all the manners and people of Russia, he did learn to know her soul, and he has given it to us in The Secret City (1916) and The Dark Forest (1919). It is the Russia of the Revolution which he knows, the Russia which is a mass of hidden forces and emotions, whose people are sincere and passionate, determined to realize their desires. To be sure, Mr. Walpole may not have correctly interpreted the spirit of Russia. But at least he has interpreted sincerely its effect upon himself.

Henry Bohun, the young Englishman in The Secret City, felt the compelling spirit of Petrograd on his first night there. "Was the room hypnotic? Why not.. I myself am aware of what walls and streets and rivers, engaged on their own secret life in that most secret of towns, can do to the mere mortals who interfere with their stealthy concerns."<sup>12</sup>

The constant stress which Walpole places on the influence of place over circumstance, character and mind, grows almost tiresome at times. We too feel the spell of Cornwall, of London, of old, mysterious houses, and of Russia. But we wish sometimes that his characters were a little more practical minded and not quite so ready to be dominated. However, his genuinely good stories and the skillful use of atmosphere which accompanies them, definitely prevent Mr. Walpole's novels from becoming mere expositions of a thesis. And when we remember that this delight in the power of places is the same feeling which lead to the masterly symbolism of The Cathedral, it is even more worthy of appreciation. Walpole has done his finest work in The Cathedral because he knows cathedrals and their atmosphere better than any other place or society, but he is equally ready to grasp the true spirit of the place about which he is writing, whether it be a cathedral tower or a London rooming house.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## WALPOLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD RELIGION AND THE UNSEEN

There appeared in The Delineator under date of May, 1928, an article by Hugh Walpole entitled, "My Religious Life." The article is distinctly written to appeal to the popular mind, probably upon request of the editors, although that is a publishers' secret which we shall not have revealed to us. It would undoubtedly be unjust to accuse Mr. Walpole of being insincere. However, he shows here a decided tendency to sentimentalize about religion; and while this is what the average American reader of The Delineator wants, it cannot rightly be considered characteristic of Walpole. So we shall not consider "My Religious Life" too seriously, although the very fact that such an article was published in a popular magazine is in itself a proof that there is something about Walpole's work which shows that he has ideas about religion.

It was inevitable that living as he did in families whose entire life revolved about the church, its obligations, ceremonies and privileges, Walpole thought a good deal about religion even while a boy. In fact, he says, "it was related of me that the first time that I was given a prayer book I wanted to scribble a story over the pages of it, so that from the beginning

I was trying to unite these two opposites: the mystic sense of life - and story telling."<sup>1</sup>

That seems the key to Walpole's attitude toward religion. It is not a separate, isolated emotion, distinct from his other feelings and beliefs. It is more truly a concept of and an attitude toward life which at once embraces and epitomizes all other concepts and attitudes. It is manifested in a deep belief in and reverence for the true, hidden forces behind life, wherever they may be found. He is concerned not with dogmas, creeds, and men's interpretations, nor with the particular nature of those forces, but with the fact that the forces do exist.

In The Captives, Maggie is throughout the book a victim of religion. There would seem to be little connection between the worldly, almost immoral, certainly unwholesome, religion of her father, who unthinkingly and unsuccessfully guided his little flock at the Rectory of St. Dreots, and on the other hand the passionate, mystical religion of the Kingscote Brethren in London. Almost equally different is the cold, formal religion of Paul Trenchard, whom Maggie marries to escape from her aunts. Walpole and his readers see the faults in all of these different kinds of religion, see that

1. My Religious Life, Delineator, May, 1928, page 19

none of them are what their adherents think they are. Yet the whole book proves that there is something in religion itself powerful enough to exert an active influence.

Maggie could not escape it. "After her visit there the chapel became a nightmare to her - because, at once, she had felt its power. She had known - she had always known... - that there was something in this religion - yes, even in the wretched dirt and disorder of her father's soul."<sup>2</sup> And when she finally managed to get away from the Kingscote Brethren there was still religion. When Uncle Matthew came to see her at Skeaton, where Paul Trenchard was pastor, "he looked dismally about him, at the thick, dull, laurel bushes and the heavy, grey sky. 'I don't like this place, Maggie,' he said, 'and all those women. It's religion again and it's worse than that Chapel. You don't seem to be able to get away from religion.'"<sup>3</sup>

Nor does Walpole ever wholly escape from religion, although he does not talk about it in all of his books. He is always looking for the hidden meanings and truths of life. The Gods and Mr. Perrin might have

2. The Captives, page 120

3. Ibid., page 363

been a very matter-of-fact and prosaic story of private school life. It might even have been the kind of sociological novel that sounds like a lecture or an article in a scientific journal. That, however, is not Walpole's way of approaching a subject. It is the spirit of the school that he emphasizes, that constant weaving absorption with little things and little thoughts that drives men mad. The episode of the umbrella which Traill absent-mindedly picks up and Perrin makes the object of a spectacular quarrel is in itself an exciting short story. But Walpole makes us wonder what it can be that can lead grown men to stoop to squabble over an umbrella. That is the theme of the whole novel.

Somewhat the same sort of result from a life revolving around petty interests is worked out in The Old Ladies. This, by the way, is one of Walpole's best books. It is short, well constructed, full of delightful atmosphere and clean cut characterization, and not without suspense. The tragedy of the whole situation is that none of the three old ladies, Mrs. Amorest, Miss Payne, and May Bellinger, has anything worth living for, yet all of them are trying to make life worth living. May Bellinger is a pathetic victim of unattractiveness and homosexual inclinations, which of course are unsatisfied. Agatha Payne has become a slave to mere physical delights, jam and plum cake

and bright colors. Mrs. Amorest alone of the three has preserved a sweet and normal disposition. Nevertheless all of them are alive, and thrown together by fate for a few months. As in the case of The Gods and Mr. Perrin, another novelist might have tried to make it a humorous situation, somewhat in the style of Cranford perhaps, but Walpole has attempted rather to discover what is behind such lives.

It is not surprising to find that the symbolic element appeals strongly to Walpole. In Fortitude there is the man on the lion, who influences Peter throughout his London life until at the end of the book he sees himself in a vision as the triumphant rider. In The Duchess of Wrexe, there is the beast which every man has within his soul, which must be conquered. In The Green Mirror the mirror in the Trenchard drawing room is the symbol of all the family traditions - and in the last chapter Henry breaks the mirror after all the traditions have been shattered.

Mrs. Trenchard, herself almost a symbol of the old family traditions, and the old Duchess in The Duchess of Wrexe are indeed very much alike. The main difference is that Mrs. Trenchard rules her family because of her own immovable passivity, while the Duchess is always actively at work to dominate her world. Both The Green Mirror and The Duchess of



Wrexe illustrate the problem of traditions versus youth, which is one of Walpole's favorite subjects. Both are stories of London, the new London in conflict with the old. The Green Mirror is the more cheerful and brighter story of the two. While Rachel Seddon in The Duchess of Wrexe is never satisfied and never quite happy, the young Trenchards are full of life and ambition, confident and eager to have wonderful lives, and getting ready to have them with all their strength. Walpole used the same theme in The Cathedral, and indeed Joan Brandon and Rachel Seddon are alike in many respects. But it is Walpole's attitude that we are interested in; he is not content to describe London life as it appears - what appeals to him is the soul of London and of life, the real forces behind the old and the new, which inevitably result in a struggle.

Walpole's delight in subtle philosophizing has lead him in The Golden Scarecrow almost beyond his depths. The book is a series of sketches rather than a novel. These sketches are all based on one theme: the idea that every child at birth has a mysterious "friend" or advisor who, well known during infancy, appears less and less frequently for several years until he is completely, or almost completely, forgotten. The fancy is a beautiful one, and Walpole's introduction,

which we feel is the story of his own childhood, is delightful. But the idea is almost too poetic for treatment in prose, especially prose extended to the length of a long novel, and Walpole is not quite skillful enough to carry it out successfully throughout the book. The stories grow tiresome, we know what is coming next, and the style is not delicate enough to seem equal to the idea. And the conclusion is not quite clearly developed. Walpole attempts to carry all of the children described in the book back to the scene of his childhood, merely in his mind's eye of course, and it is rather difficult to know when they are actually there and actually real children, and when they are merely philosophical or hypothetical children. Nevertheless, the idea is charming, and the book is worth reading, especially if one is fond of Walpole's work.

So different from The Golden Scarecrow that they seem hardly written by the same man are The Prelude to Adventure and The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, both of which are distinctly novels of atmosphere. The Prelude to Adventure is a story of life at Oxford and of a murder committed by a college student. The plot is psychological, the effect of the crime upon the boy who committed it. Its distinction lies in the fact that the chief emotion throughout is not remorse for the crime but a sense of loneliness because it has set him irreparably apart

from his fellows. The suspense is tremendous, the atmosphere of doubt stifling. Incidentally it is a supremely entertaining mystery story, although its chief value is as a character study and a masterly example of style and atmosphere.

The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, as we have noted before, is a study of the emotion of fear. Crispin himself, the man with red hair, is unspeakably repulsive. His cruelty both to men and animals is almost unbelievable. He breaks the necks of living animals and twists men's arms from their sockets for the pure enjoyment of causing pain. Added to the effect of having such a character the dominant one in the story, is the wierd spell of Cornwall where the story takes place; and a sustained atmosphere of fear is deliberately created by Walpole to emphasize the original feeling of terror. In fact, the atmosphere which Walpole has created in this book may be favorably compared with some of the best work of Poe. The author chooses night as the time for most of the incidents, he chooses stormy weather, he chooses characters who are extremely sensitive to atmosphere and environment. He works up to climaxes, each showing some new aspect of Crispin's cruelty. He describes the psychological and physiological effect of fear upon his characters.

Walpole has objected because so many people have praised him as a master of atmosphere, while he wished to excel in character portrayal. But although he is undoubtedly successful in character delineation, by nature and by environment he is essentially unfitted to ignore the real spirit of either places or events, and that necessarily results in "atmosphere."

Even in his stories of children Walpole does not content himself with superficialities. We have already seen his method of approach in The Golden Scarecrow. Jeremy is the story of a delightful small boy, just as "real" a small boy as Tom Sawyer or Penrod. But he is a small boy who thinks. It is quite likely that Penrod, if afflicted with a homely, hypersensitive sister like Mary Cole, would have had small regard for her feelings and would have spent all his time in teasing her. Jeremy tries to figure out for himself how she feels about things and why she should be so sensitive, and although he cannot understand her he does his best to be kind to her. Likewise, he enjoys his rough and tumble life at school like any other boy, but nevertheless he spends a good many hours thinking about his place in the school and his relations with his friends. And the description of Jeremy's first visit to the cathedral alone one winter afternoon is almost like

Walpole's own experience.

In fact, almost all of Walpole's characters reflect something of his own personality. It is as though he is so filled with the idea that there is a mystery behind all the things we see and hear that he must create characters who are seeking that mystery as earnestly as he. They do not all come in actual contact with a cathedral, although most of his later books are written about Polchester, but the spirit of the cathedrals which Walpole knows is always present. There is always a sense of some power stronger and more enduring than any of the men or women about whom the novel is written, and these men and women, whatever may be their attitude toward that power, always realize its existence.

It is true that a somewhat lighter touch might improve Walpole's work at times. With all his seriousness, however, he is seldom depressing, for along with his realization of hidden forces, he is firmly convinced of the constant change of forces, of the inevitable triumph of youth and progress over age and tradition. Yet he loves the old order of things, just as he loved the cathedral with its shadows and gloom. Even the tyrannical Duchess of Wrexhe and Archdeacon Brandon, probably the two most conspicuous representatives of this old order, are presented with sympathetic understanding. And throughout his work there is always

the same tolerance, which leaves the feeling that life is too power for mortals to control, but that all aspects of life and character are worth knowing and understanding. We are ready to believe after reading a few of his books that Walpole really does always try to unite "the mystic sense of life and story telling," and we are glad that circumstances forced him to spend his childhood among cathedrals.

## CONCLUSION

### A FEW GENERALIZATIONS

We have seen that Walpole's work has from the beginning been profoundly influenced by the English Cathedral. His novels dealing with cathedral life amply illustrate his actual knowledge of cathedral towns, while his attitude toward the cathedral itself, toward other places, toward his characters, and toward religion, philosophy and life in general, show the influence which the spirit of the English cathedral has had upon his thought and character.

Nevertheless, in estimating Walpole's work as a whole, we find, needless to say, a good many characteristics that can be attributed neither to the influence of the cathedral nor to his love for cathedrals. It is a great temptation when one is deliberately looking for traces of an influence to attribute to it much for which it is not directly responsible. Therefore, great care has been taken throughout this study to avoid over-emphasizing the influence of the cathedral and to give full credit to Walpole's own genius.

One of Walpole's most characteristic traits, and one which it is fascinating to trace, is his constant

use of his own personal experiences in the lives of his characters. Peter Westcott, for example, is quite unmistakably a reincarnation of Walpole as a struggling young novelist. Peter's life as a whole is entirely distinct, but his methods of writing, the themes of his early books, and their reception, are taken from Walpole's own experience. Peter, like Walpole, is impressed by the power of Cornwall and writes a book about the experiences of a man of forty, although he himself is barely twenty at the time, as Walpole did in the case of Maradiok at Forty. Peter admires and is guided by the advice of an elder novelist, while Walpole devotes an entire chapter of The Crystal Box to a description of his friendships with famous authors, who aided his youthful efforts.

In the descriptions of Jeremy's school life, and of Peter Westcott's also, we find two-fold traces of Walpole's childhood. Jeremy is Walpole in a way because he is such an unusually honest and serious small boy. But also like Walpole are the weak, sentimental, abused little boys whom Jeremy and Peter have to champion. The terror of these midgets at the persecution they receive reminds one very strongly of Walpole's own experiences at his first school, when he lived in constant terror;



terror, he says, such as he has never known since.

In The Golden Scarecrow Walpole calls the hero Hugh Seymour, and the story of the little boy whose parents are away and who is forced to spend his vacations in a family of clergy is quite like the author's childhood, especially since this Hugh is just the kind of timid, introspective lad that Walpole describes himself as being.

Walpole also has a habit, if it may be called a habit, of letting the same characters wander aimlessly in and out of all his books. Peter Westcott, the hero of Fortitude, appears in The Young Enchanted as the friend and advisor of Henry and Millie Trenchard. One of Peter's first novels, we have already noted, was about the fortunes of a business man of forty, which story corresponds to Walpole's Maradick at Forty. James Maradick, however, appears in Fortitude as a character, after Peter has written the book, and he and Peter get together and compare their impressions of Cornwall. Maradick appears again in the Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, and induces Charles Percy Harkness to go to Treliss by giving him a hint of the adventures he himself has experienced there, the adventures which Walpole described in Maradick at Forty. It is startling at first, and makes one feel as though he were on a merry-go-round, never to be sure what characters are going to drop into the story at

any moment; but after all, England is a small place, and Walpole probably feels that there is no reason why the England of his novels should not be just as small and friendly a place as the real England.

One is surprised to find among Walpole's characters such a variety of types. It is easy to see, to be sure, where he found his material for the cathedral folk whom he describes so well. But a figure like the Duchess of Wrexhe, so powerfully and clearly delineated, yet with such a delicate touch, is indeed an achievement. Remarkably well portrayed also are Rachel and Roddy Seddon, Janet Brandisson, and many other figures in that London group which gives the material for several novels. The little artist, Brun, is painted with exceptional skill. Although a minor character and one who never becomes too prominent, from his first appearance he stands out as a unique type, and remains Felix Brun and no one else throughout both The Duchess of Wrexhe and Winters-moon.

Another group of characters whom Walpole has treated with especially marked success is composed of old women, usually unmarried ones. They are by no means lovable characters for the most part, but we cannot but admire Walpole's portrayal of them. There are, first of all, the three in The Old Ladies, whom

we have already discussed. Then there is Aunt Aggie in The Green Mirror, who always imagines people are neglecting and do not appreciate her, and who is so selfish in her desire to be generous that she makes herself a nuisance to everyone. In The Young Enchanted we find Miss Ellen Platt, whose sentimental passion for Millie is pathetic even while it is revolting.

Walpole is usually at his best in the portrayal of characters who are misunderstood and handicapped. While this can have no particular connection with the cathedral, it can perhaps be attributed partly to his experiences at school, from which he says he will never entirely recover, so miserable was he for those few years. Although this may be but a personal preference, no other character of Walpole's seems to the writer to be stronger or portrayed more subtly than Olva Dune in The Prelude to Adventure, who was isolated from his fellows both by his crime and by the nature of his own temperament. Ivan Andreievitch in The Secret City is also one of Walpole's most striking figures, although his companions scarcely realized his personality.

Altogether, when one makes a study of Walpole's characters, there is no danger that he will not be given due credit for them, even though he does complain that people have constantly praised

him for his skill in atmosphere and setting rather than characterization.

Walpole has faults, to be sure, a great many of them. One of the most noticeable is his lack of a sense of humor. There are a few light touches to be found when one looks for them. The scene in The Green Mirror where Katherine and Philip exchange notes through the pages of Pride and Prejudice under the watchful eyes of Aunt Aggie, is full of sparkling wit. The Young Enchanted has a brighter tone all the way through, beginning with Henry's sprawling awkwardly on the pavement and continuing through Millie's experiences with Miss Lottie Platt and Henry's struggles to keep the old letters of his employer properly filed. But the pervading tone of all Walpole's work is serious, perhaps too serious. An earnest and thoughtful attitude toward life is admirable, but it does get tiresome, and we wish that such a trivial event as the Archdeacon's losing his hat might be told in such a way that we could laugh heartily at the accident.

Walpole is rather careless also. One critic has objected to Maggie's marriage with Paul Trenchard in The Captives, as being inconsistent with her character. Maggie, he asserts, has always been fearless, eager for independence and determined to go after her own happiness. So when she marries a man

whom she does not love and assumes a mass of unwelcome responsibility, it really is surprising, and if not actually inconsistent with Maggie's character, it does really mar the effectiveness of the novel. Although the theme of the entire book is the restraining effect of religion, and this episode does contribute to that, nevertheless from a structural standpoint, The Captives would be much more unified if Maggie's marriage to Paul had not taken place.

It is a mark of carelessness too to find, as we do in Harmer John that the story is told by someone who at times is an ordinary person who has lived in and visited Polchester, and at other times, is an omniscient observer who looks into the minds and hearts of the characters at will. This uncertainty as to the personality of the narrator is, to say the least, confusing to the reader. Also, well as Walpole knows his Polchester Cathedral and everything in it, we find him stating in The Cathedral that the Black Bishop's Tomb is made of blue stone, while in Harmer John it is described as of green stone.

In his earlier work, especially, Walpole showed a distressing lack of unity at times. Fortitude is bewildering in its maze of adventures all happening to one young man. Maradick at Forty is a charming story, but it wanders a good deal, and would be twice as effec-

tive if it were half as long. The Duchess of Wrexhe, with its masterly conception of the character of the old Duchess and her influence, should be a much more powerful novel than it is. But Walpole gets so interested in following the fortunes of individual characters that he sometimes forgets that his central idea is the overwhelming influence of the Duchess, and as a consequence the story loses some of its forcefulness.

In his later work, however, Walpole is proving that he has realized these faults and is going to overcome them. The Portrait of a Man with Red Hair, without a doubt, has made up for any weakness in construction in Maradick at Forty. In Wintersmoon the same theme is developed as in The Duchess of Wrexhe, but far more skillfully both as regards plot and characterization. There is no one figure in Wintersmoon as prominent as the Duchess, but the whole group of aristocrats is so well and strikingly presented that it seems almost one character.

There can be no denying the fact that Walpole will stand out among twentieth century novelists as an interpreter of cathedral life. He also must be granted a place as a master of atmosphere. And as a portrayal of character he can hold his own.

It is difficult, in fact, impossible, for us,

in 1928, to reach any final decision as to the merits of an author who has published one or more volumes each year since 1909, and who will probably continue to publish them for many more years. It is possible, however, for us to present this estimate of what Hugh Walpole has already accomplished and to add to it the prophecy that if he continues to produce work as fine as that given us in The Cathedral, Harmer John and The Old Ladies, he will still in the year 2028 be considered the leading twentieth century "cathedral novelist."

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